

Davis Cup semifinal

Rafter-Kuerten opener



BRISBANE, Australia, July 13: Jet-lagged Pat Rafter may feel he has hit a brick wall, but five days after losing the Wimbledon final he has the responsibility of getting Australia off to a winning start in the Davis Cup semifinal against Brazil, report AFP.

Just days off a plane from London, the dual US Open champion is pitted against two-time French Open winner Gustavo Kuerten in what shapes as a barometer of Brazil's chances of upsetting the defending champions on grass.

Guga, as the flamboyant baseliner is referred to by Brazilians, holds the South Americans' hopes of making their first Davis Cup final against either Spain or the United States.

Kuerten, who beat Magnus Norman for his second French Open crown at Roland Garros last month, is drawn to be on court for all three days of the tie at the ANZ Stadium.

With him lie Brazil's psychological odds of dethroning the Australians, whose preparation has been distracted by last weekend's Wimbledon final and the Mark Philippoussis no-show.

"We all hit a brick wall last night, but it's not too bad because we are waking up early and we do have to wake up early to come on the court tomorrow," Rafter said of the team's hurried exodus from London to Brisbane.

Rafter, ranked 14 in the world after being a former No. 1, shrugs off suggestions of a let-down after losing to Pete Sampras in last Sunday's Wimbledon final.

"I've been in this position quite a few times before and I can't see the same thing happening here as what happened in Wimbledon," he said Thursday.

Rafter, who is 13-7 in Davis Cup, is looking forward to the challenge of facing Kuerten, the current leader of the ATP Tour Race rankings and 19-7 in Cup singles.

"Gustavo serves very well and I have to get that serve back and the court's playing quite quickly and I'm going to have to serve well and if I get into the

rallies then I think I've got as good a chance as he has on the baseline on these type of courts," said Rafter.

"I'll serve and volley like I was at Wimbledon then I've probably got a better chance than he has."

Laid back Kuerten said he was not a "morning person" but he will have to rouse himself early on Friday with the opening match scheduled for 9.30 a.m. (0030 GMT).

Kuerten had been inconvenienced by a groin injury during practice earlier in the week, but said he had overcome that and was ready to play.

"I knew I was going to play Rafter already, to play him in the first or second match it doesn't really matter," he said. "I am playing well at the moment and I will play at least a good game against him."

"I am more worried about myself than him, and I'll see in the match how he's going to play. I'm sure he'll find a way to motivate himself."

Australia's No. 1 Lleyton Hewitt, knocked out in the first round of Wimbledon by American Jan-Michael Gambill but involved in the mixed doubles final, will face Fernando Meligeni in the second singles rubber on Friday.

"I think I definitely have better results on grass than Fernando has but he is a very good competitor and I'm going to have my work cut out tomorrow," said Hewitt, who was Australia's hero in the semifinal win over Russia here last year.

Meligeni said of his chances: "I'm comfortable. I'm playing very good. I'm happy to play here, the semi-finals. We're going to play a very solid match during the three days."

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Newcombe has selected Wimbledon doubles champion Mark Woodforde to pair with Sandon Stolle, who turned 30 Thursday.

They are due to play Kuerten and Jaime Oncins, who have won eight of their last nine Cup doubles ties.

Doubles line-ups can be altered and Newcombe refused to rule out using Rafter on Saturday.

"We'll just see what happens tomorrow," he said.

Brazil captain Ricardo Acioy said Australia were the slight favourites for the semi-final tie.

"If you are playing at home and playing on the courts that you choose to play, and if you are playing with the crowd, definitely there's some kind of favoritism there," Acioy said. "But we all know that the favoritism stops when the match starts."

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Cricket calendar 2000-2001

Sports Reporter

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) on last Saturday announced their annual cricket calendar for the 2000-2001 season.

The highlight among the year's events is Bangladesh's first ever Test match which will be on home soil in January 2001. The BCB has also drawn up an extended domestic programme for different age groups apart from regular events like the leagues of Dhaka and the National League.

The National League is the only first class competition.

THE CRICKET CALENDAR OF BANGLADESH CRICKET BOARD FOR THE 2000-2001 SEASON.

International (home and abroad)

Event	Date
1. ICC Knock-out in Kenya	September 25, 2000
2. Tour of South Africa and Zimbabwe	October, 2000
3. Triangular tournament in Dhaka	November, 2000
4. Maiden Test in Dhaka	January, 2001
5. Asia Cup in Pakistan	April, 2001

Domestic

Event	Date	Venue
1. Inter-Club cricket transfer	October 1-3	BNS
2. Darnal Smriti Cricket Tournament	October 21-November 15	BNS/DCS/BKSP
3. Premier Division Cricket League	October 18-January 31	BNS/DCS
4. First Division Cricket League	December 1 - February 1	DCS/City Club
5. Second Division Cricket League	December 1 - February 1	MOS/UCF/T&T/City Club
6. Victory Day Cricket Tournament	December 14-16	BNS/DCS
7. Shaheed Smriti Exhibition Matches	February 1-15	BNS/DCS
8. National Cricket League	February 3 - April 15	Across the Country
9. Inter-Club Transfer for Second and Third Division Leagues	October	BNS
10. Third Division Cricket League	December 15- February 15	MOS/City Club/UCF/T&T
11. National School Cricket District and Divisional phases	December - March	Districts/Divisions
12. National School Cricket Final phase	February - March	Not yet decided
13. National Youth Championship	January - March	All Divisional Headquarters
14. National Youth Championship	March	Not yet decided
15. Third Division Qualifiers	April - May	MOS/DCS/City Club/UCF/T&T

Coaching Programmes

Event	Month
1. Under-15/17 coaching Division wise	May, 2000
2. Under-15/17 coaching final phase (Dhaka)	June, 2000
3. Under-19 coaching Division wise	September-October, 2000
4. Under-19 coaching final phase (Dhaka)	October-December, 2000
5. Under-13 coaching Division wise	September-October, 2000
6. Umpires Refresher Course	June, 2000
7. Training of National Team	August-September, 2000
8. Under-10/12 coaching Division wise	September-October, 2000
9. Under-15 coaching Division wise	May, 2001
10. Under-15 coaching final phase (Dhaka)	June, 2001

Note:
BNS: Bangabandhu National Stadium
DCS: Dhanmndi Cricket Stadium
UCF: Uttara Friends Club
MOS: Mirpur Outer Stadium
T&T: Mahakhali T&T Ground

Seles dreaming of Sydney

HARTFORD, Connecticut, July 13: Former world number one Monica Seles has declared the United States Olympic tennis lineup for Sydney a "Dream Team" and looks to bring home gold in September, reports AFP.

"I'm so excited to go," Seles said here Wednesday. "We have a Dream Team of our own and hopefully we can win it and bring home the gold. It was such a nice surprise to make it. I didn't think it was going to happen because I had been injured for so long."

Seles edged Serena Williams for the final singles spot on the US women's team, which also includes Wimbledon champion Venus Williams and reigning US Open queen Lindsay Davenport.

Seles, 26, suffered a stress fracture to a right foot last September that kept her sidelined for six months. The left-hander made a triumphant return last February, winning a WTA title at Oklahoma City.

Seles, a winner of nine Grand Slam singles tournaments, will take part in her second Olympics. She lost in the quarterfinals at the 1996 Games in Atlanta to now retired Jana Novotna of the Czech Republic.

"I just had such a good time the first time. Seeing all the other athletes from different fields was great," she said. "Representing your country is such an honor."

The Yugoslavian-born American, naturalized in 1994, said she can regain the physical form and mental toughness she once had over opponents before her dramatic stabbing in April 1993 which caused her to take a 2 1/2-year break from the WTA Tour.

"Only time will tell. But I'm getting closer. I've just got to get stronger. That's one area where I need to improve along with my serve, return and movement."

Seles has not won a Grand Slam tournament since the 1996 Australian Open.

She's the one

SCHENECTADY, July 13: Serena Williams can see what she's doing for tennis when she looks into the stands at a World Team Tennis match, reports AP.

"There were a lot of people of colour and it was good to see a lot of people getting into a sport they haven't been exposed to," Williams said. "It's great because a lot of people can't afford to get the 10,000 dollars seats."

The audience Wednesday, not quite a sellout at 2,500-seat Central Park stadium, was still largely white and compared with other diversions in this city, 22-33 dollars for a ticket is not cheap.

For residents like Jackie Moore, it's still a step in the right direction.

"Because I'm African American, it makes me feel good to see something that she's doing, to see some of my people out there striving and succeeding," Moore said.

While Moore said she has been a tennis fan for years, she never even noticed the World Team Tennis matches in Schenectady until this year's publicity over Williams' appearance, coming right after last week's Wimbledon semifinals where Serena lost to sister Venus, the eventual champion.

"We saw it yesterday and said, 'We've got to get there,'" said Moore, who attended the match with her 11-year-old son, Brandon.

Williams played World Team Tennis in Delaware on Tuesday, winning all her matches for the Smash — one day after teaming with Venus to win the doubles title at Wimbledon.

Venus Williams became the first African-American woman to win Wimbledon since Althea Gibson in 1957 and 1958. In September, Serena won the US Open, the last of the four Grand Slam tournaments each year, becoming the first black woman to win the event since Gibson in 1958.

"I'm a tennis fan because of these two," Carstarphen said. "She's brought a lot to the game, especially for black people. You realize it's possible."

Sprint of the champions

SACRAMENTO, California, July 13: The titans of American sprinting, world record holders Michael Johnson and Maurice Greene, will duel for pride and Sydney Games berths in intriguing US Olympic trials, which begin on Friday, reports Reuters.

After months of hype and barbs, Johnson and Greene will finally decide who is best at 200 metres on Greene's 26th birthday, July 23, during 10 days of cut-throat trials already filled with interesting sub-plots.

Can Marion Jones, for example, win both women's sprints and the long jump to launch her quest for five gold medals in Sydney? Will her husband, C. J. Hunter, claim the men's shot put title as he did at last year's World Championships?

The top three finishers in each event will qualify for Sydney.

"The trials are the biggest meet of my life right now," said Greene, who has never run at the Olympics despite his two World Championships and world record 9.79 seconds in the 100 metres.



Australian Patrick Rafter waves at the draw ceremony for the Davis Cup semifinal against Brazil in Brisbane yesterday.

— AFP photo

Davis Cup semifinal

No Sampras or Agassi



WHITE PLAINS, New York, July 13: In a surprising turn of events Pete Sampras and Andre Agassi are both out of the United States Davis Cup squad to play Spain next week with 41-year-old captain John McEnroe on Wednesday naming himself temporarily as one of the four players, reports AFP.

Todd Martin, Jan-Michael Gambill and first-round hero Chris Woodruff remain in the team to play on clay in next week's semifinals at Santander in northern Spain, with

World number one Sampras overcame tendinitis in his left shin to win his record 13th grand slam and seventh Wimbledon title on Sunday at the All-England Club, but was advised by his doctor to take 2-3 weeks off.

Meeting a deadline to announce the team, McEnroe stated that if he does play Davis Cup, it would only be in a doubles capacity.

"I haven't actually decided to compete," he said. "There is a good chance I won't play, but there is a chance I will play, and if I take the court, I'm not going out there to lose. Until yesterday, it wasn't even something I was thinking about."

After the U.S. squeaked by in the first two rounds to earn a semifinal berth, McEnroe said the chances of going to Europe and defeating a strong Spanish contingent of players like Alex

Corretja and Juan Carlos Ferrero are "probably 10-20 percent."

"They've [Spain] got three of the top 10 players in the world on clay," McEnroe said. "Now we're going to be huge underdogs."

The 28-year-old Sampras did not play for the U.S. in the team's first-round tie at Zimbabwe in February due to a hip injury he suffered during the Australian Open. He split his singles matches for the Americans in their quarter-final victory over the Czech Republic in Los Angeles.

Agassi, the 1999 French Open champion, had gone unbeaten in four Davis Cup matches this season, and his untimely accident has given McEnroe his biggest challenge since taking over as captain in September.

"I didn't realize that this would be taking place," McEnroe said. "I guess I was looking at it optimistically. I was hoping that my presence would

make a real difference. At this point you either call it bad luck or it hasn't made a difference."

Martin, a seven-year Davis Cup veteran, has competed in only seven tournaments in 2000 after suffering a knee injury early in the season. He took Agassi to five sets before losing in the second round at Wimbledon.

Gambill advanced to his first Grand Slam quarterfinal at Wimbledon before losing to Sampras. His only previous Davis Cup experience came in 1998, going 1-1 in the semifinals against Italy.

Woodruff recorded the biggest victory of his career when he won the fifth and decisive match in the first-round singles match in Zimbabwe. He was left off the team in the quarterfinals after McEnroe had both Sampras and Agassi at his disposal.

The tie will be held at a 10,500-seat temporary stadium at the Real Sociedad de Tenis de la Magdalena in Santander on July 21-23.

The Spanish team, announced last month, is comprised of Corretja, Ferrero, Albert Costa and Juan Balcells.

This will be the fifth all-time meeting in Davis Cup between the two countries, with the United States leading the all-time series, 3-1. In their last meeting, the U.S. defeated Spain 4-1, in the 1991 quarterfinals in Newport, Rhode Island.

Sardinia is normally warm at this time of year, and Nuoro is at a reasonable altitude of 500 metres, conditions Ottey said she was hoping would contribute to a run somewhere around 11.20, but the weather was unseasonably cold and blustery.

"Mentally, I didn't want a big meet, and there are not too many races elsewhere, but I thought conditions would be better," she added.

The time was way outside her personal best of 10.74, a benchmark she is hoping to better at the Olympics — her last major competition.

Jamaican sprint legend Merlene Ottey waves to spectators after winning the 100m in Nuoro, Sardinia on July 12.

— AFP photo

Rumble in London tomorrow



LONDON, July 13: World heavyweight boxing champion Lennox Lewis may have been late for Wednesday's press conference — but the adopted Briton is in no doubt his punches will arrive on time when he comes face to face with Francois Botha, reports AFP.

South African Botha, who resides in California, will challenge Lewis at the London Arena on Saturday for his WBC and IBF world heavyweight titles.

Lewis, 34, was stripped of his WBA title by a New York judge in April last year after refusing to fight their number one contender Henry Akwande.

Canadian-born Lewis arrived 45 minutes late for the conference so Botha had to speak to the media alone.

Botha, wearing a white pin-striped suit, sunglasses, and plenty of gold jewellery, fumed: "It's rude. He might feel that because he's the champion he can do what he wants but he shouldn't forget his responsibilities."

But the London-born fighter, more conservatively dressed in a tracksuit, laughed off Botha's reaction when he arrived,

blaming his punishing training schedule for his tardiness.

"I was out running and finishing my workout and then we made our way over here," said Lewis, who arrived 10 minutes after Botha had left.

"You have to remember that he's the challenger and I'm the undisputed champion so he should have to wait a few minutes for me. That's the way it should be. Obviously I will make him pay for that in the ring."

Lewis, preparing for his first fight here since 1994, said he is in prime condition for Botha's challenge.

"I feel very confident for this fight, well prepared. I've stayed in training camps in America since my last fight with Michael Grant so I feel very fit. I'm gonna win this fight."

Asked how many rounds he would do it in Lewis replied: "It depends on the script really. If Francois makes it a difficult fight by running around and trying to survive, its going to be difficult but I'll catch up with him real soon."